

July 30, 1999

these experiments in defiance of their conscience, the law, and the more fundamental principles of human dignity.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND TEEN VIOLENCE

HON. BERNARD SANDERS

OF VERMONT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 29, 1999

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I submit for printing in the RECORD this statement by high school students from my home State of Vermont, who were speaking at my recent town meeting on issues facing young people today. I believe that the views of these young people will benefit my colleagues.

REGARDING SCHOOL VIOLENCE

(On behalf of Sarah Mayer, Jessica Normand and Colleen McCormick)

Jessica Normand: Set aside the accusations, the anger and the 20-20 hindsight about the massacre of twelve students and one teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20th. The fact remains that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's disturbed states of mind are the result of problems that our society has a responsibility to acknowledge and change.

This event has broken the already damaged national spirit, but it has brought to our attention the moral decline in American society. The lack of spiritual guidance among the nation's youth that was once thought to be politically correct has only made it easier for young Americans to feel lost. Why did Eric Harris believe so strongly that life held no value, and why did Dylan Klebold feel so alone that he followed the demonic beliefs of his friend? These are the questions America must ask itself. Parents, teachers, administrators, friends, relatives, religious leaders, and especially our government need to take an active role in the lives of young Americans if future tragedies like the one at Columbine High are to be avoided.

Sarah Mayer: Why is it that prayer is forbidden in public schools, yet at the memorial service for those who died in Littleton, the theme of every speech was that the only way to heal such a wound was through faith in God and prayers of the spiritual community?

My fellow classmates and I at Rice Memorial High School are privileged to have prayer in our everyday lives. We feel that teaching kids about their spirituality gives them a stronger moral base to make better decisions throughout their lifetime. An anonymous student from a Catholic high school once said, "We do not kill together because we pray together."

Colleen McCormick: Kids need to be able to differentiate between fantasy and reality. But can they do this when video games like Doom, which teaches children how to kill people, are readily available? In order to curb the availability of those games, greater restrictions need to be placed on the Internet and sale of home games. Although the Internet has a lot faster communication and is an effective learning tool, it has also made unhealthy influences such as pornography and deadly games to be at the fingertips of the young.

The media is another aspect of our society that needs to be more careful about what images they present to children in this country. While freedom of the press is a trade-

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mark right of Americans, perhaps that right needs to be restricted in terms of violence and sex.

Our proposal is that legislation be passed to more strictly enforce the age limits at movie theaters, and all television channels be required to rate their shows according to a government rating system.

Jessica Normand: Besides the media and schools, the most important influence every child has are their parents. As a society, we need to implore all parents to be involved in their children's lives, and to keep track of the outside influences, such as the Internet and the harmful media we mentioned earlier.

Sarah Mayer: Kids need to understand that this isn't a video game, it's life, and there is no reset button.

Thank you.

REGARDING TEEN VIOLENCE

(On behalf of Alicia Prince)

ALICIA PRINCE: I am Alicia Prince, here to speak on reducing teen violence.

I think we are all ready affected by what happened in Littleton. It has definitely given me the passion to come up here to say it.

I am originally from East Los Angeles, California, and I experienced firsthand the type of violence that happens throughout our neighborhoods, communities, and in our schools. I think that firearms are a really big part of that, and I think that that should be discussed. I'm not antigun; I understand peoples' rights to carry firearms, private collectors, and households as well. But when they're in the wrong hands, there is trouble, there is a problem there. And a child's hands are the wrong hands, and there is no reason why they should even be accessible.

My specific suggestion would be that there is absolutely no reason why every gun in this country, in this state, cannot be locked up, and ammunition locked up separately. There is no reason to have a loaded gun in your car, in your house. I understand where it is an issue in big cities. But it is not an issue where you have to carry a 9 millimeter strapped to your ankle and walk into a school in Vermont.

I think that this also goes to a deep-rooted problem of the way our parenting is in this society. Too many times, I have seen people perpetuate these cycles of poverty and violence because they just don't know any better. They don't know how to direct children in a different direction, because that's the way they have been taught. I think that mandatory parenting classes are absolutely essential. It is very important, and no harm can be done in it. I think it should be mandatory, and I think it is very important that parents know how to take care of their kids and know how to prevent this from happening.

There is no reason why these kids, especially in Littleton, should not have been—you know, this couldn't have gone unnoticed. Okay? They were in the garage five hours, you know, working on bombs, and they had it written in diaries. This was accumulating for the past year and a half before it was, you know, executed. And I think that that is a direct, you know, obvious thing, that the parenting is just not happening adequately enough.

I am also a ward of the state. I am a foster kid. And all of the foster parents in which I live in their homes, every gun that is in their house and ammunition must be locked up separately. There is no reason it should not be done in every other house throughout this country.

So my two main suggestions would be, really good family counseling. Parents need

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to know how to create safe families, so that a teenager or a child has a sense of safety and belonging in their home and in school, instead of having to fight or shoot their way out of safety in school or in the community. And I think it is absolutely ludicrous this is happening when we have every power of preventing it.

CONGRESSMAN SANDERS. Thank you, Alicia.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2000

SPEECH OF

HON. EARL POMEROY

OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 27, 1999

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2587) making appropriations for the government of the District of Columbia and other activities chargeable in whole or in part against revenues of said District for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and for other purposes.

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Chairman, I rise in opposition to the Largent amendment to H.R. 2587. This measure would undermine efforts to place children in the foster care system in the District of Columbia in permanent homes.

There are currently over 3,000 children in the D.C. foster care system, more than 1,000 of whom are currently eligible for adoption. Many of these children have special needs and are difficult to place. No other development will have as great an impact on these children's lives as whether they will be able to be part of a family of their own. By placing restrictions on joint adoptions, the Largent amendment lessens the chance that these 3,000 children will ever be part of a "forever family."

The Largent amendment would also prevent child welfare workers from making decisions based on the best interests of individual children. The success of the child welfare system depends upon its ability to recognize that every waiting child has individual needs. The Largent amendment favors the judgment of Congress over that of child welfare professionals, who are experts at determining what constitutes a safe and loving home. Child advocacy organizations across the country, including the Children's Defense Fund and the Child Welfare League of America, also oppose this amendment and have recognized that it could endanger the future of over 3,000 children.

Mr. Chairman, no event has so profoundly transformed my own family as the adoption of my children, Kathryn and Scott. I will always be deeply grateful that my wife and I were able to welcome these two exceptional children into our home. The Largent amendment could prevent other families from experiencing this joy, and I urge my colleagues to oppose it.